

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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P 202119Z MAY 76

FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7441

INFO ZEN AMEMBASSY LIMA

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UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 ASUNCION 2095/1

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SHUM, PA

SUBJ: FRIENDSHIP MISSION

REF: (A) STATE 120157 (B) ASUNCION 2012, (C) GILL-BRAZEAL LETTER,
MAY 10,1976

1. SUMMARY: THE MISSIONARY WORK OF THE DISCIPLES OF
CHRIST CHURCH IN PARAGUAY HAS BEEN SEVERLY HAMPERED BY THE
ARREST OF SEVERAL EMPLOYEES OF "FRIENDSHIP MISSION", INCLUD-
ING (OVERNIGHT) AN AMERICAN PASTOR AND THE ECUADOREAN DIRECTOR. TO TRY

TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM THE PRESIDENT OF THE DIVISION OF OVER-
SEAS MINISTRIES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)
AND STAFF HAVE JUST VISITED ASUNCION. TO OBTAIN MAXIMUM
IMPACT OF HIS VISIT AMBASSADOR ARRANGED MEETINGS WITH CABINET
MINISTERS AND WITH PRESIDENT STROESSNER. THROUGH STRENUOUS
REPRESENTATION EMBASSY SECURED IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF THE
AMERICAN AND ECUADOREAN PASTORS, AND OTHERWISE ASSISTED
DR. THOMAS DURING HIS STAY. GOP PROMISED TO SPEED UP
INVESTIGATION OF REMAINING DISCIPLES OF CHRIST EMPLOYEES
(ALL PARAGUAYANS). VIST WAS MOST USEFUL IN UNDERSCORING
TO GOP THE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROBLEM
FACING THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST IN PARAGUAY. END SUMMARY

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2. THE DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO DRAW ON THE CONTENTS OF
THIS TELEGRAM TO ANSWER QUESTIONS REGARDING RECENT EVENTS
IN PARAGUAY AFFECTING "FRIENDSHIP MISSION," ONE OF THE
GAMOST IMPORTANT AMERICAN PROTESTANT MISSIONARY EFFORTS HERE

OPERATING UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

3. THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST CHURCH HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN PARAGUAY FOR SEVERAL DECADES AND IN 1920 FOUNDED ASUNCION'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS SCHOOL, THE COLEGIO INTERNACIONAL. THE MISION DE AMISTAD ("FRIENDSHIP MISSION") WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1953. FOUR YEARS AGO IT BRANCHED OUT INTO SOCIAL WORK THROUGH AN EXTENSION SERVICE ORGANIZATION CALLED PROMOCION URBANA RURAL INDIGENE (PURI). INTER ALIA PURI HAS ORGANIZED A NUMBER OF RURAL COOPERATIVES. UNTIL NOW THE WORK OF THE MISION DE AMISTAD AS WELL AS OURI HAS BEEN LOOKED UPON WITH FAVOR BY THE AUTHORITIES. THE DIRECTOR OF THE MISION IS AN ECUADOREAN, THE REV. MR. VICTOR VACA (FORMERLY A USAID EMPLOYEE IN ECUADOR) WHO IS EMPLOYED BY THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST, USA, AS ONE OF THEIR OVERSEAS MISSIONARIES. HE IS ASSISTED BY THE REV. MR. FRISCO GILCHRIST, AN AMERICAN AND ALSO AN OVERSEAS MISSIONARY OF THE CHURCH WHO HAS BEEN IN PARAGUAY FOR OVER 20 YEARS AND CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE MISION SINCE ITS FOUNDING.

4. FOLLOWING THE UNCOVERING OF A NEW TERRORIST ORGANIZATION BY THE AUTHORITIES EARLY LAST MONTH, THE POLICE BEGAN A WIDE-RANGING SERIES OF ARRESTS OF PERSONS SUSPECTED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION. THESE ARRESTS ARE CONTINUING MANY OF THOSE NOW DETAINED HAVING BEEN IMPLICATED BY PERSONS ARRESTED EARLIER. ON OR ABOUT APRIL 10 A NUMBER OF MISION DE AMISTAD EMPLOYEES, MOST OF THEM WORKING IN PURI, WERE ARRESTED AND SINCE THEN HAVE BEEN HELD WITHOUT CHARGES UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE PERMANENT STATE OF SIEGE. ALL BUT ONE OF THOSE ARRESTED AT THAT TIME WERE PARAGUAYANS (A CHILEAN, LUCIANO PAREDES, WAS RELEASED, EXPELLED FROM THE COUNTRY, AND WENT TO PERU. TWO OTHER EMPLOYEES, UBALDO CHAMORRO AND HIS WIFE LILA, AVOIDED ARREST BY SEEKING REFUGE IN THE GERMAN EMBASSY, AND HAVE SINCE DEPARTED THE COUNTRY.) ON MAY 18 MESSRS VACA AND GILCHRIST WERE ARRESTED AND HELD OVERNIGHT. UNCLASSIFIED

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STILL UNDER ARREST ARE DIONISIO BORDA, CARLOS FLORES, RAMON GIMENEZ, JOSE OJEDA, CRISTOBAL ORTIZ, WALDINA SOTO, AND MARCELINO ZARZA, ALL OF THE MISION DE AMISTAD; AND PROF. JOSE GUGGIARI, A TEACHER AT THE COLEGIO INTERNACIONAL.

5. THE WORK OF THE MISION DE AMISTAD HAS BEEN SEVERELY HAMPERED BY THE ARRESTS, WHICH HAVE CREATED A CLIMATE OF UNREST, DISTRUST AND FEAR AMONG THE REMAINING STAFF, AND PURI HAS COME TO A VIRTUAL STANDSTILL (EXCEPT FOR LONE MAJOR INDIAN PROJECT WHICH SO FAR HAS NOT BEEN AFFECTED). TO LOOK INTO WAYS OF AMELIORATING THE SITUA-

TION THE REV. DR. ROBERT A THOMAS, PRESIDENT OF THE DIVISION OF OVERSEAS MINISTRIES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) AND DR. WILLIAM NOTTINGHAM EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CHURCH FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, VISITED ASUNCION MAY 13-19. THEY SOUGHT TO ASCERTAIN THE SPECIFIC CHARGES AGAINST THE DETAINED EMPLOYEES AND TO OBTAIN THEIR RELEASE IF POSSIBLE, ANF TO SEEK SOME KIND OF COMMITMENT OR AT LEAST CLARIFICATION FROM THE GOP AS TO WHAT ACTIVITIES THE MISION DE AMISTAD AND THE CHURCH MIGHT UNDERTAKE IN PARAGUAY IN THE FUTURE. THEY LEFT AFTER MEETING THE PRESIDENT ON MAY 19, WITH ASSURANCE THAT EFFORTS WOULD BE MADE TO EXPEDITE THE INVESTIGATION OF THOSE UNDER ARREST. THEY WERE ALSO ASSURED THAT WHILE THE GOVERNMENT GENERALLY APPROVES OF WHAT THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST CHURCH HAS BEEN DOING IN PARAGUAY (THE CILDREN OF MANY HIGH- RANKING GOP OFFICIALS ATTEND THE COLEGIO INTERNACIONAL), GIVEN THE CURRENT TERRORIST THREAT IT HAS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO INVESTIGATE THOROUGHLY ANY AND ALL REPORTS OF COMPLICITY, WHOEVER MAY BE INVOLVED. NO COMMITMENTS WERE GIVEN REGARDING EITHER THE RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS OR FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF THE MISION DE AMISTAD WHICH SEVERAL OF THE PARAGUAYAN OFFICIALS GENUINELY BELIEVE UNWITTINGLY ALLOWED ITSELF TO BE USED BY SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS.

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